

Explore the World's Top Universities

A global, high-tech economy is helping fuel the rise in international education, experts say.



By Kelsey Sheehy Oct. 8, 2013 17 Comments [SHARE](#)

International student enrollment is on the rise at U.S. colleges.

In total, 764,495 international students were enrolled at colleges and universities across the United States during the 2011-2012 school year, up 5.7 percent from the previous year, according to a [November 2012 report](#) from the Institute of International Education.

The U.S. News [Best Colleges](#) rankings can help prospective American and international students refine their list of target schools in the United States, but some of the world's best universities can be found outside the U.S. as well.

China, Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany and France all attract more than 100,000 international students each year, according to IIE data.

Latin America, the Middle East and other parts of Asia have also seen an uptick in international student enrollment over the past decade, according to a study by the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#).

One explanation for the trend toward international education: an "exploding demand for higher education worldwide," the OECD notes.

Studying in a foreign country – whether for a semester, a year or for an entire degree – also helps prepare students to enter a high-tech and highly global economy, says Allan Goodman, president of IIE.

Executives at multinational corporations might work in nine or 10 different countries throughout their career. Those who stay closer to home will likely still work with people from other cultures on a regular basis, says Goodman, who co-authored "A Student Guide to Study Abroad."

"If you're the top student, but you've never sat next to a Chinese or Brazilian, or had an argument with an Indian or a discussion with a Frenchman, you're not going to be prepared to be a worker in the global marketplace," he says.

Sorting out where to study and why can be a multipronged equation.

For some, language is a primary factor. Students either want to learn in their native language or become fluent in another. Others want to gain business expertise abroad in order to get a leg up in an increasingly competitive workforce.

Many international students also choose where to study based on where they hope to start their careers, says Daniel Obst, IIE's deputy vice president of international partnerships in higher education.

"There's a great opportunity in another country to do academic work, but also then connect it to your first job," he says.

Obst has personal experience as an international student. Born and raised in Germany, Obst earned his bachelor's degree in the United States and his master's in England. His academic interests motivated him to study outside of Germany, he says.

"I wanted to do international relations, and back then they didn't have that as a degree program in Germany. They had political science," he says.

Whatever the motive to study overseas, each major region has something to offer students bent on studying overseas.

Europe

The United Kingdom alone is home to some of the world's best universities.

University of Cambridge and University of Oxford, both in England, and the University of Edinburgh in Scotland excel in literature, English and creative writing. Each college has educated its fair share of the literary greats, including T.S. Elliot, Sylvia Plath, C.S. Lewis and many others.

International students accounted for 18.6 percent of total higher ed enrollment in the U.K. in 2010-2011, according to IIE.

Students can venture outside of the U.K. and still get a great education in Europe.

Schools such as the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Ecole Normale Supérieure de Paris, the University of Copenhagen in Denmark and Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg in Germany also have strong global reputations.

Asia

Students from China, India and South Korea account for 52 percent of the 4.1 million international students worldwide, according to the OECD. But the region has also emerged as a top destination for foreign students.

Asia is among the fastest growing destinations for international students, and foreign enrollment at universities in Indonesia and South Korea have more than doubled since 2005, the agency reports.

China continues to be the most popular destination in the region, though, ranking third among countries that host the most international students, IIE reports.

The University of Hong Kong, National University of Singapore, University of Tokyo and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology are a few of the many well-regarded universities in the region.

Latin America

Brazil and Chile are experiencing a boom in international enrollment. Both countries have more than doubled the number of foreign students at their universities, the OECD reports.

Universidad de Chile and Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, as well as Universidade de São Paulo and Universidade Estadual de Campinas in Brazil are among the top universities in the region.

Argentina, Colombia and Mexico are also home to some of the best universities in Latin America.

In most cases, students must speak the native language – either Spanish or Portuguese, depending on the country – in order to study in one of these countries.

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